



Testimony before the Select Committee on Children Committee
Re: S.B. 273 – An Act Concerning the Care4Kids Program
Submitted by Marilyn Calderón, Executive Director
Connecticut Parent Power
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Good afternoon, Senator Gerrantana, Representative Urban, and members of the Select Committee on Children. I am Marilyn Calderón, Executive Director of Connecticut Parent Power a statewide parent-led organization that engages, educates and mobilizes diverse parents from across the state to act on issues that matter most to them improving outcomes for all children in areas of early childhood, care, education, health care reform and K-12 school systems.

Connecticut Parent Power supports S.B. 273 – An Act Concerning the Care4Kids Program. This bill: 1) expands the category of minor parents eligible for Care4Kids; 2) extends the eligibility period for women who are on maternity leave; 3) extends the eligibility period for parents who lose their job and are seeking re-employment; and 4) phases in an increase in reimbursement rates up to federal guidelines by 2022.

Minor Teen Parents

This bill provision would help keep minor parents enrolled in a high school program by excluding their parents' income when calculating eligibility for Care4Kids assistance. Under current regulations, when a minor teen parent lives with their own parents, their parents' income is taken into account, and often, the teen parent is therefore not eligible for Care4Kids. As a result, the teen may need to drop out of high school to care for the child due to the high cost of child care. Worse, the teen could leave their parents' home in order to qualify for Care4Kids, leading to more socioeconomic factors with an unstable housing situation.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to high school dropout rates among teens. This provision of the bill would prevent young parents from dropping out of high school, thus lowering the high school drop-out rate and giving the teen parent a better chance for future success. Expanding Care4Kids to this relatively small population would support fragile young parents and keep them in school. This provision would also allow a very young child of a teen parent access to quality early care and education and a safe and nurturing environment. In addition, the teen parents can learn important information about child development from their early care provider, and be linked up to other community-based resources.

Maternity Leave

This bill provision would extend the eligibility period to 12 weeks for women currently on Care4Kids who are temporarily absent from work for maternity leave. Currently, when a woman on Care4Kids takes time off for maternity leave, she is required to notify the program, at which point the child care subsidy is suspended until she returns to work. As a result, the mother is forced to pull her child out of care for the maternity leave period, which means the child's routine is disrupted and is no longer receiving



developmentally appropriate services. According to the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, studies document that schedules and routines influence a child's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Also, when the child is pulled from care, it puts a financial burden on the early care provider who must fill the slot or keep it open for the returning child, which causes many stressors.

The mother must be physically at work before she can re-apply for Care4Kids for child care for her children. That application process, based on historical trends, can take up to 45 days to be reinstated. This puts a financial burden and risk on the child care center. Does the center take the child back with the assumption that the Care4Kids subsidy will be reinstated? If not, the mother loses the slot and cannot return to work, causing further financial pressures on an already struggling and fragile family.

Given the minimal salaries of parents eligible for the Care4Kids program, the mother is likely to take as short a maternity leave as possible. Does it make sense to disrupt the healthy development of a young child, put the parent at risk of losing a job, put a financial burden on child care providers, just for a brief maternity leave? This provision makes sense for children, working parents, and early care providers.

Unemployed Parents

This bill provision would extend eligibility for up to six months after a parent loses a job and is seeking re-employment. Currently, when a parent enrolled in Care4Kids loses a job, the subsidy is maintained between four and eight weeks, depending upon the time of the month the parent loses the job. In this economic climate, this window is clearly insufficient for a person to seek and secure a new job. Extending eligibility during a period of employment provides continuity of care for the child, provides time for the parent to seek a new job, and promotes stability and family economic security.

Care4Kids Rates

This bill provision would phase in an increase in Care4Kids rates up to the federal guidelines of the 75th percentile of market rates by 2022. Raising rates both improves the quality of care and increases choice and access of care. Connecticut is one of three states that have not raised child care subsidy rates since 2002. The federal government recommends that state set rates at the 75th percentile of that state's current market rate, which means families could afford to access three out of four slots with the subsidy. Connecticut sets its Care4Kids rate at the 60th percentile of

2001 market rates. As required, Connecticut does conduct a market rate survey, but does not implement the finding of the market rate survey.

Raising rates addresses both quality and access. With increased rates, families will have more choice and access to quality child care, and providers will be better able to attract, pay and retain staff. According to the Connecticut Department of Labor, child care workers are among the lowest paid workers in the state. It is alarming that we pay workers such a low wage to take on one of the most important jobs: care for and preparing young children for school and life-long success. Raising rates would increase the wages of early care professionals, which goes hand in hand with new requirements



that early care professionals meet degree standards as passed in P.A. 11-54: An Act Concerning Requirements for Early Childhood Educators.

Connecticut Parent Power acknowledges the considerable cost of raising Care4Kids rates to the federal recommendations, however, safe, quality care and education should always be at the forefront when it comes to our most vulnerable - our children. Therefore, the bill phases in the rate increases over the next 10 years. We strongly support the bill provision that allocates the scheduled \$6.8 million increase for FY13 as a first down payment to increase provider rates, expand access, and increase quality.

Thank you for enabling me the opportunity to testify.